



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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*Office of the United States Attorney
District of Arizona*

For Information Contact Public Affairs
MIKE JOHNS
Telephone: (602) 514-7566

“LADY IN CHARGE” FOUND GUILTY OF CONSPIRACY TO HARBOR ILLEGAL ALIENS

PHOENIX, Arizona - Julieta Franco-Beltran, 47, of Mexico, was found guilty today of Conspiracy to Harbor Illegal Aliens, 8 U.S.C. Section 1324(a)(1)(A)(v)(I), by a federal jury in Phoenix. The case was tried before United States District Court Judge Frederick J. Martone between January 4, 2006 and January 10, 2006. The defendant is being held. Sentencing is set before Judge Martone on April 4, 2006 at 4:30pm.

The evidence at trial showed that the defendant conspired to harbor illegal aliens at the Glendale Groves Condominiums in Glendale, AZ. On October 31, 2003, 32 undocumented aliens were held at gunpoint at Glendale Groves Apartment #112. On that same date, seven smugglers were arrested and charged with harboring the illegal aliens and hostage taking. Also found in relation to the harboring were two assault rifles, a .38 special handgun, and almost \$40,000 of alien smuggling proceeds. Further investigation revealed that the defendant arranged and paid for the rental of apartment #112, a mere six days prior to the discovery of the illegal aliens, knowing that the apartment would be used to harbor undocumented aliens. A witness at trial testified that upon inquiring of the defendant's whereabouts at the apartments, the witness was told that "the lady in charge" was at another apartment. Evidence at trial also revealed that the defendant rented at least four apartments in 2003. The defendant had no legitimate income but was able to pay, in cash, thousands more than the usual monthly rental price for three of the four apartments.

Paul K. Charlton, United States Attorney for the District of Arizona, said this defendant remained distant from the actual location of the harbored aliens and attempted to conceal her role in the smuggling operation. However, this case demonstrates how a cooperative effort by law enforcement can lead to a successful prosecution of a high-ranking member of an alien smuggling organization despite her efforts to remain anonymous.

"Ms. Franco was a significant top-level figure in a major human smuggling organization whose members have committed numerous violent offenses," said Roberto G. Medina, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement office of investigation in Arizona. "Her conviction shows our continued success in disrupting and dismantling these ruthless, criminal enterprises which exploit the vulnerability of their victims."

A conviction for Conspiracy to Harbor Illegal Aliens carries a maximum penalty of 10 years, a \$ 250,000 fine or both. In determining an actual sentence, Judge Martone will consult the U.S.

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Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

The investigation leading to the guilty verdict was conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Pinal County Sheriff's Department.

The prosecution was handled by Lisa Jennis Settel, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix, Arizona

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